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The Father of the Forest
and Other Poems



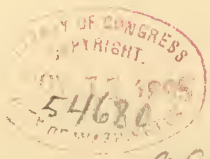
The Father of the Forest and Other Poems

BY
WILLIAM WATSON



CHICAGO: STONE & KIMBALL
LONDON: JOHN LANE

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The Father of the Forest

TO JOHN ST. LOE STRACHEY

The Father of the Forest

I

OLD emperor Yew, fantastic sire,
Girt with thy guard of dotard kings,
What ages hast thou seen retire
Into the dusk of alien things?
What mighty news hath stormed thy shade,
Of armies perished, realms unmade?

Already wast thou great and wise,
And solemn with exceeding eld,
On that proud morn when England's eyes,
Wet with tempestuous joy, beheld
Round her rough coasts the thundering
main
Strewn with the ruined dream of Spain.

Hardly thou count'st them long ago,
The warring faiths, the wavering land,
The sanguine sky's delirious glow
And Cranmer's scorched, uplifted hand.
Wailed not the woods their task of shame,
Doomed to provide the insensate flame?

Mourned not the rumouring winds, when she,
The sweet queen of a tragic hour,
Crowned with her snow-white memory
The crimson legend of the Tower?
Or when a thousand witcheries lay
Felled with one stroke, at Fotheringay?

Ah, thou hast heard the iron tread
And clang of many an armoured age,
And well recall'st the famous dead :
Captains or counsellors, brave or sage,
Kings that on kings their myriads hurled,
Ladies whose smile embroiled the world.

Rememberest thou the perfect knight,
The soldier, courtier, bard in one,
Sidney, that pensive Hesper-light,
O'er Chivalry's departed sun?
Knew'st thou the virtue, sweetness, lore,
Whose nobly hapless name was More?

The roystering prince, that afterward
Belied his madcap youth, and proved
A greatly simple warrior lord,
Such as our warrior fathers loved—
Lives he not still? for Shakespeare sings
The last of our adventurer kings.

His battles o'er, he takes his ease,
Glory put by, and sceptred toil.
Round him the carven centuries
Like forest branches arch and coil.
In that dim fame, he is not sure
Who lost or won at Azincour!

6 The Father of the Forest

Roofed by the mother minster vast
 That guards Augustine's rugged throne,
The darling of a knightly Past
 Sleeps in his bed of sculptured stone,
And flings, o'er many a warlike tale,
The shadow of his dusky mail.

The monarch who, albeit his crown
 Graced an august and sapient head,
Rode roughshod to a stained renown
 O'er Wallace and Llewellyn dead,
And perished in a hostile land,
With restless heart and ruthless hand.

Or that disastrous king on whom
 Fate, like a tempest, early fell,
And the dark secret of whose doom
 The Keep of Pomfret kept full well ;
Or him that with half-careless words
On Becket drew the dastard swords ;

Or Eleanor's undaunted son,
That, starred with idle glory, came
Bearing from leaguered Ascalon
The barren splendour of his fame,
And, vanquished by an unknown bow,
Lies vainly great at Fontevraud ;

Or him, the footprints of whose power
Made mightier whom he overthrew ;
A man built like a mountain-tower,
A fortress of heroic thew ;
The Conqueror, in our soil who set
This stem of Kingdom flowering yet ;

These, or the living fame of these,
Perhaps thou minglest—who shall say?—
With thrice remoter memories,
And phantoms of the mistier day
Long ere the tanner's daughter's son
From Harold's hands this realm had won.

What years are thine, not mine to guess!

The stars look youthful, thou being by;
Youthful the sun's glad-heartedness;

Witless of time the unaging sky,
And these dim-groping roots around
So deep a human Past are wound,

That, musing in thy shade, for me

The tidings scarce would strangely fall
Of fair-haired despots of the sea

Scaling our eastern island-wall,
From their long ships of norland pine,
Their "surf-deer," driven o'er wilds of brine.

Nay, hid by thee from Summer's gaze

That seeks in vain this couch of loam,
I should behold, without amaze,

Camped on yon down the hosts of Rome,
Nor start though English woodlands heard
The selfsame mandatory word

As by the cataracts of the Nile
 Marshalled the legions long ago,
Or where the lakes are one blue smile
 'Neath pageants of Helvetian snow,
Or 'mid the Syrian sands that lie
Sick of the Day's great tearless eye.

Or on barbaric plains afar,
 Where, under Asia's fevering ray,
The long lines of imperial war
 O'er Tigris passed, and with dismay
In fanged and iron deserts found
Embattled Persia closing round.

And 'mid their eagles watched on high
 The vultures gathering for a feast,
Till, from the quivers of the sky,
 The gorgeous star-flight of the East
Flamed, and the bow of darkness bent
O'er Julian dying in his tent.

II

Was it the wind befooling me
 With ancient echoes, as I lay?
Was it the antic fantasy
 Whose elvish mockeries cheat the day?
Surely a hollow murmur stole
From wizard bough and ghostly bole!

“Who prates to me of arms and kings,
 Here in these courts of old repose?
Thy babble is of transient things,
 Broils, and the dust of foolish blows.
Thy sounding annals are at best
The witness of a world’s unrest.

“Goodly the ostents are to thee,
 And pomps of Time: to me more sweet
The vigils of Eternity,
 And Silence patient at my feet;

And dreams beyond the deadening range
And dull monotonies of Change.

“ Often an air comes idling by
 With news of cities and of men :
I hear a multitudinous sigh
 And lapse into my soul again.
Shall her great noons and sunsets be
Blurred with thine infelicity?

“ Now from these veins the strength of old,
 The warmth and lust of life depart :
Full of mortality, behold
 The cavern that was once my heart !
Me, with blind arm, in season due,
Let the aërial woodman hew.

“ For not though mightiest mortals fall,
 The starry chariot hangs delayed;

His axle is uncooled, nor shall

 The thunder of His wheels be stayed.
A changeless pace His coursers keep,
And halt not at the wells of sleep.

“The South shall bless, the East shall blight,
 The red rose of the Dawn shall blow ;
The million-lilied stream of Night
 Wide in ethereal meadows flow ;
And Autumn mourn, and everything
Dance to the wild pipe of the Spring.

“With oceans heedless round her feet,
 And the indifferent heavens above,
Earth shall the ancient tale repeat
 Of wars and tears, and death and love ;
And, wise from all the foolish Past,
Shall peradventure hail at last

“The advent of that morn divine,
When nations may as forests grow,
Wherein the oak hates not the pine,
Nor beeches wish the cedars woe,
But all, in their unlikeness, blend
Confederate to one golden end—

“Beauty: the Vision whereunto,
In joy, with pantings, from afar,
Through sound and odour, form and hue,
And mind and clay, and worm and star—
Now touching goal, now backward hurled—
Toils the indomitable world.”

Hymn to the Sea

TO HENRY NORMAN

Hymn to the Sea*

I

GRANT, O regal in bounty, a subtle and
delicate largess ;

Grant an ethereal alms, out of the wealth
of thy soul :

Suffer a tarrying minstrel, who finds, not
fashions his numbers,—

Who, from the commune of air, cages the
volatile song,—

Here to capture and prison some fugitive
breath of thy descant,

Thine and his own as thy roar lisped on
the lips of a shell.

*Copyright.

Now while the vernal impulsion makes lyrical
all that hath language,
While, through the veins of the Earth,
riots the ichor of Spring,
While, with throes, with raptures, with loos-
ing of bonds, with unsealings,—
Arrowy pangs of delight, piercing the core
of the world,—
Tremors and coy unfoldings, reluctances,
sweet agitations,—
Youth, irrepressibly fair, wakes like a won-
dering rose.

II

Lover whose vehement kisses on lips irre-
sponsive are squandered,
Lover that woost in vain Earth's imper-
turbable heart ;

Athlete mightily frustrate, who pittest thy
 thews against legions,
 Locked with fantastical hosts, bodiless
 arms of the sky ;
Sea that breakest forever, that breakest and
 never art broken,
 Like unto thine, from of old, springeth the
 spirit of man,—
Nature's wooer and fighter, whose years are
 a suit and a wrestling,
 All their hours, from his birth, hot with
 desire and with fray ;
Amorist agonist man, that immortally pining
 and striving,
 Snatches the glory of life only from love
 and from war ;
Man that, rejoicing in conflict, like thee when
 precipitate tempest,
 Charge after thundering charge, clangs on
 thy resonant mail,

Seemeth so easy to shatter, and proveth so
hard to be cloven ;

Man whom the gods, in his pain, curse with
a soul that endures ;

Man whose deeds, to the doer, come back
as thine own exhalations

Into thy bosom return, weepings of moun-
tain and vale ;

Man with the cosmic fortunes and starry
vicissitudes tangled,

Chained to the wheel of the world, blind
with the dust of its speed,

Even as thou, O giant, whom trailed in the
wake of her conquests

Night's sweet despot draws, bound to her
ivory car ;

Man with inviolate caverns, impregnable
holds in his nature,

Depths no storm can pierce, pierced with
a shaft of the sun ;

Man that is galled with his confines, and
burdened yet more with his vastness,
Born too great for his ends, never at peace
with his goal ;

Man whom Fate, his victor, magnanimous,
clement in triumph,
Holds as a captive king, mewed in a pal-
ace divine :

Wide its leagues of pleasance, and ample of
purview its windows ;

Airily falls, in its courts, laughter of foun-
tains at play ;

Naught, when the harpers are harping, un-
timely reminds him of durance ;

None, as he sits at the feast, whisper Cap-
tivity's name ;

But, would he parley with Silence, withdraw
for awhile unattended,

Forth to the beckoning world 'scape for
an hour and be free,

Lo, his adventurous fancy coercing at once
and provoking,
Rise the unscalable walls, built with a
word at the prime ;
Lo, immobile as statues, with pitiless faces
of iron,
Armed at each obstinate gate, stand the
impassable guards.

III

Miser whose coffered recesses the spoils of
eternity cumber,
Spendthrift foaming thy soul wildly in
fury away,—
We, self-amorous mortals, our own multitud-
inous image
Seeking in all we behold, seek it and find
it in thee :

Seek it and find it when o'er us the exquisite
fabric of Silence

Perilous-turreted hangs, trembles and dul-
cetly falls ;

When the aërial armies engage amid orgies
of music,

Braying of arrogant brass, whimper of
querulous reeds ;

When, at his banquet, the Summer is purple
and drowsed with repletion ;

When, to his anchorite board, taciturn
Winter repairs ;

When by the tempest are scattered magnifi-
cent ashes of Autumn ;

When, upon orchard and lane, breaks the
white foam of the Spring :

When, in extravagant revel, the Dawn, a
bacchante upleaping,

Spills, on the tresses of Night, vintages
golden and red ;

When, as a token at parting, munificent Day,
for remembrance,
Gives, unto men that forget, Ophirs of
fabulous ore ;

When, invincibly rushing, in luminous palpi-
tant deluge,
Hot from the summits of Life, poured is
the lava of noon ;

When, as yonder, thy mistress, at height of
her mutable glories,
Wise from the magical East, comes like a
sorceress pale.

Ah, she comes, she rises,—impassive, emo-
tionless, bloodless,
Wasted and ashen of cheek, zoning her
ruins with pearl.

Once she was warm, she was joyous, desire
in her pulses abounding :

Surely thou lovedst her well, then, in her
conquering youth !

Surely not all unimpassioned, at sound of
thy rough serenading,
She, from the balconied night, unto her
melodist leaned,—
Leaned unto thee, her bondsman, who keep-
est to-day her commandments,
All for the sake of old love, dead at thy
heart though it lie.

IV

Yea, it is we, light perverts, that waver, and
shift our allegiance ;
We, whom insurgence of blood dooms to
be barren and waste ;
We, unto Nature imputing our frailties, our
fever and tumult ;
We, that with dust of our strife sully the
hue of her peace.

Thou, with punctual service, fulfillest thy
task, being constant ;
Thine but to ponder the Law, labour and
greatly obey ;
Wherefore, with leapings of spirit, thou
chantest the chant of the faithful,
Chantest aloud at thy toil, cleansing the
Earth of her stain ;
Leagued in antiphonal chorus with stars and
the populous Systems,
Following these as their feet dance to the
rhyme of the Suns ;
Thou thyself but a billow, a ripple, a drop of
that Ocean,
Which, labyrinthine of arm, folding us
meshed in its coil,
Shall, as now, with elations, august exulta-
tions and ardours,
Pour, in unfaltering tide, all its unanimous
waves,

When, from this threshold of being, these
steps of the Presence, this precinct,
Into the matrix of Life darkly divinely
resumed,

Man and his littleness perish, erased like an
error and cancelled,

Man and his greatness survive, lost in the
greatness of God.

The Tomb of Burns

TO THE HON. MRS. HENNIKER

The Tomb of Burns*

WHAT woos the world to yonder shrine?
What sacred clay, what dust divine?
Was this some Master faultless-fine,
In whom we praise
The cunning of the jewelled line
And carven phrase?

A searcher of our source and goal,
A reader of God's secret scroll?
A Shakespeare, flashing o'er the whole
Of Man's domain
The splendour of his cloudless soul
And perfect brain?

*Copyright.

Some Keats, to Grecian gods allied,
Clasping all Beauty as his bride?
Some Shelley, soaring dim-descried
Above Time's throng,
And heavenward hurling wild and wide
His spear of song?

A lonely Wordsworth, from the crowd
Half hid in light, half veiled in cloud?
A sphere-born Milton cold and proud,
In hallowing dews
Dipt, and with gorgeous ritual vowed
Unto the Muse?

Nay, none of these,—and little skilled
On heavenly heights to sing and build!
Thine, thine, O Earth, whose fields he tilled,
And thine alone,
Was he whose fiery heart lies stilled
'Neath yonder stone.

He came when poets had forgot
How rich and strange the human lot ;
How warm the tints of Life ; how hot
 Are Love and Hate ;
And what makes Truth divine, and what
 Makes Manhood great.

A ghostly troop, in pale amaze
They melted 'neath that living gaze,—
His in whose spirit's gusty blaze
 We seem to hear
The crackling of their phantom bays
 Sapless and sere !

For, 'mid an age of dust and dearth,
Once more had bloomed immortal worth.
There, in the strong, splenetic North,
 The Spring began.
A mighty mother had brought forth
 A mighty man.

No mystic torch through Time he bore,
No virgin veil from Life he tore ;
His soul no bright insignia wore
 Of starry birth ;
He saw what all men see—no more—
 In heaven and earth :

But as, when thunder crashes nigh,
All darkness opes one flaming eye,
And the world leaps against the sky,—
 So fiery-clear
Did the old truths that we pass by
 To him appear.

How could he 'scape the doom of such
As feel the airiest phantom-touch
Keenlier than others feel the clutch
 Of iron powers,—
Who die of having lived so much
 In their large hours?

He erred, he sinned: and if there be
Who, from his hapless frailties free,
Rich in the poorer virtues, see
 His faults alone,—
To such, O Lord of Charity,
 Be mercy shown!

Singly he faced the bigot brood,
The meanly wise, the feebly good;
He pelted them with pearl, with mud;
 He fought them well,—
But ah, the stupid million stood,
 And he—he fell!

All bright and glorious at the start,
'Twas his ignobly to depart,
Slain by his own too affluent heart,
 Too generous blood;
And blindly, having lost Life's chart,
 To meet Death's flood.

So closes the fantastic fray,
The duel of the spirit and clay!
So come bewildering disarray
 And blurring gloom,
The irremediable day
 And final doom.

So passes, all confusedly
As lights that hurry, shapes that flee
About some brink we dimly see,
 The trivial, great,
Squalid, majestic tragedy
 Of human fate.

Not ours to gauge the more or less,
The will's defect, the blood's excess,
The earthy humours that oppress
 The radiant mind.
His greatness, not his littleness,
 Concerns mankind.

A dreamer of the common dreams,
A fisher in familiar streams,
He chased the transitory gleams
 That all pursue ;
But on his lips the eternal themes
 Again were new.

With shattering ire or withering mirth
He smote each worthless claim to worth.
The barren fig-tree cumbering Earth
 He would not spare.
Through ancient lies of proudest birth
 He drove his share.

To him the Powers that formed him brave,
Yet weak to breast the fatal wave,
A mighty gift of Hatred gave,—
 A gift above
All other gifts benefic, save
 The gift of Love.

He saw 'tis meet that Man possess
The will to curse as well bless,
To pity—and be pitiless,
 To make, and mar ;
The fierceness that from tenderness
 Is never far.

And so his fierce and tender strain
Lives, and his idlest words remain
To flout oblivion, that in vain
 Strives to destroy
One lightest record of his pain
 Or of his joy.

And though thrice statelier names decay,
His own can wither not away
While plighted lass and lad shall stray
 Among the broom,
Where evening touches glen and brae
 With rosy gloom ;

While Hope and Love with Youth abide ;
While Age sits at the ingleside ;
While yet there have not wholly died
 The heroic fires,
The patriot passion, and the pride
 In noble sires ;

While, with the conquering Saxon breed
Whose fair estate of speech and deed
Heritors north and south of Tweed
 Alike may claim,
The dimly mingled Celtic seed
 Flowers like a flame ;

While nations see in holy trance
That vision of the world's advance
Which glorified his countenance
 When from afar
He hailed the Hope that shot o'er France
 Its crimson star ;

While, plumed for flight, the Soul deploras
The cage that foils the wing that soars ;
And while, through adamantine doors
 In dreams flung wide,
We hear resound, on mortal shores.
 The immortal tide.

Sonnets

I THINK you never were of earthly frame,
O truant from some charmed world
unknown !

A fairy empress, you forsook your throne,
Fled your inviolate court, and hither came ;

Donned mortal vesture ; wore a woman's
name ;

Like a mere woman, loved ; and so are
grown

At last a little human, save alone

For the wild elvish heart not love could
tame.

And one day I believe you will return

To your fair isle amid the enchanted sea,

There, in your realm, perhaps remember
me,

Perhaps forget ; but I shall never learn !

I, loveless dust within a dreamless urn,

Dead to your beauty's immortality.

To_____

With a Volume of Verse.

IF, on these pale and trembling blooms,
full soon

The winter of oblivion should descend,
Remember, it was in my summer's noon

I gave you the poor posy, gentle friend.
Remember, how a fickle gust of praise

Ruffled my foliage in that perished time,
And by the after-light of these dead days
Read once again my world-forgotten
rhyme.

Say: "Fame his mistress was; he wooed
her long,

She toyed with him an hour—and flung
him by;

With me alone the memory of his song

Reluctant fades, and hesitates to die."

Then burn the book, that eyes less kind
than those

Vex not the haunted dusk of its repose.

The Turk in Armenia

WHAT profits it, O England, to prevail

In camp and mart and council, and bestrew
With sovereign argosies the subject blue,
And wrest thy tribute from each golden gale,
If, in thy strongholds, thou canst hear the
wail

Of maidens martyred by the turbaned crew
Whose tenderest mercy was the sword that
slew,

And lift no hand to wield the purging flail?
We deemed of old thou held'st a charge
from Him

Who watches girdled by His seraphim,
To smite the wronger with thy destined rod.
Wait'st thou His sign? Enough, the sleep-
less cry

Of virgin souls for vengeance, and on high
The gathering blackness of the frown of God!

MARCH 2, 1895.

Lyrics

I DO not ask to have my fill
Of wine, or love, or fame.
I do not, for a little ill,
Against the gods exclaim.

One boon of Fortune I implore,
With one petition kneel :
*At least caress me not, before
Thou break me on thy wheel.*

O LIKE a Queen's her happy tread,
And like a Queen's her golden head!
But O, at last, when all is said,
Her woman's heart for me!

We wandered where the river gleamed
'Neath oaks that mused and pines that
dreamed.

A wild thing of the woods she seemed,
So proud, and pure, and free!

All heaven drew nigh to hear her sing,
When from her lips her soul took wing;
The oaks forgot their pondering,
The pines their reverie.

And O, her happy queenly tread,
And O, her queenly golden head!
But O, her heart, when all is said,
Her woman's heart for me!

Apologia

Apologia

THUS much I know : what dues soe'er
be mine,

Of fame or of oblivion, Time the just,
Punctiliously assessing, shall award.

This have I doubted never ; this is sure.

But one meanwhile shall chide me—one shall
curl

Superior lips—because my handiwork,

The issue of my solitary toil,

The harvest of my spirit, even these

My numbers, are not something, good or ill,

Other than I have ever striven, in years

Lit by a conscious and a patient aim,

With hopes and with despairs, to fashion
them ;

Or, it may be, because I have full oft
In singers' selves found me a theme of song,
Holding these also to be very part
Of Nature's greatness, and accounting not
Their descants least heroical of deeds ;
Or, yet again, because I bring naught new,
Save as each noontide or each Spring is new,
Into an old and iterative world,
And can but proffer unto whoso will
A cool and no-wise turbid cup, from wells
Our fathers digged ; and have not thought
it shame
To tread in nobler footprints than mine own,
And travel by the light of purer eyes.
Ev'n such offences am I charged withal,
Till, breaking silence, I am moved to cry,
What would ye, then, my masters? Is the
Muse
Fall'n to a thing of Mode, that must each
year

Supplant her derelict self of yester-year?
Or do the mighty voices of old days
At last so tedious grow, that one whose lips
Inherit some far echo of their tones—
How far, how faint, none better knows than
 he
Who hath been nourished on their utterance
 —can
But irk the ears of such as care no more
The accent of dead greatness to recall?
If, with an ape's ambition, I rehearse
Their gestures, trick me in their stolen robes,
The sorry mime of their nobility,
Dishonouring whom I vainly emulate,
The poor imposture soon shall shrink re-
 vealed
In the ill grace with which their gems be-
 star
An abject brow; but if I be indeed
Their true descendant, as the veriest hind

May yet be sprung of kings, their lineaments
Will out, the signature of ancestry
Leap unobscured, and somewhat of them-
selves

In me, their lowly scion, live once more.
With grateful, not vain-glorious joy, I
dreamed

It did so live ; and ev'n such pride was mine
As is next neighbour to humility.

For he that claims high lineage, yet may feel
How thinned in the transmission is become
The ancient blood he boasts ; how slight he
stands

In the great shade of his majestic sires.
But it was mine endeavour so to sing
As if these lofty ones a moment stooped
From their still spheres, and undisdainful
graced

My note with audience, nor incurious heard
Whether, degenerate irredeemably,

The faltering minstrel shamed his starry kin.
And though I be to these but as a knoll
About the feet of the high mountains, scarce
Remarked at all save when a valley cloud
Holds the high mountains hidden, and the
knoll

Against the cloud shows briefly eminent ;
Yet ev'n as they, I too, with constant heart,
And with no light or careless ministry,
Have served what seemed the Voice ; and
unprofane,

Have dedicate to melodious ends
All of myself that least ignoble was.
For though of faulty and of erring walk,
I have not suffered aught in me of frail
To blur my song ; I have not paid the world
The evil and the insolent courtesy
Of offering it my baseness for a gift.
And unto such as think all Art is cold,
All music unimpassioned, if it breathe

An ardour not of Eros' lips, and glow
With fire not caught from Aphrodite's
breast,

Be it enough to say, that in Man's life
Is room for great emotions unbegot
Of dalliance and embracement, unbegot
Ev'n of the purer nuptials of the soul ;
And one not pale of blood, to human touch
Not tardily responsive, yet may know
A deeper transport and a mightier thrill
Than comes of commerce with mortality,
When, rapt from all relation with his kind,
All temporal and immediate circumstance
In silence, in the visionary mood
That, flashing light on the dark deep, per-
ceives

Order beyond this coil and errancy,
Is led from the fretful hour he stands alone
And hears the eternal movement, and be-
holds

Above him and around and at his feet
In million-billowed consentaneousness,
The flowing, flowing, flowing of the world.

Such moments, are they not the peaks of
life?

Enough for me, if on these pages fall
The shadow of the summits, and an air
Not dim from human hearth-fires, sometimes
blow.





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